

City of Alexandria Recreation Department
Attn: Ms. Laura Durham
1108 Jefferson Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

November 17, 2010

Dear Ms. Durham,

Thanks for the opportunity to review and comment on the November 1, 2010 draft Recommendations regarding the use and management of Fort Ward Historical Park prepared by the Fort Ward Park Advisory Group.

My comments are intended to suggest ways to make the Advisory Group's recommendations more accurate and increase the chance that they are adopted and implemented by City managers and elected officials. I fully realize that reviewing a document of this type is far, far easier than actually writing it. The time and effort of the City managers and the Advisory Group in preparing this draft is recognized and appreciated. My general and specific comments are as follows:

Ways to Improve the Draft Recommendations for Fort Ward Park

1. *Get Shorter & Tighten Up:* The document is far, far, too long. It is duplicative and redundant in several sections and the information it communicates would be much more effective if the report were edited, made more concise, and illustrated with photos. The Executive Summary and the Concluding Recommendations seem to be unnecessarily duplicative making the priority messages confusing. While reading the report I was never sure whether I was reading something new or the same text in a new location.

2. *Be Clear About the Report Purpose:* The document indicates that this is a "Draft for Public Discussion". However, despite the comments made by Advisory Group members at their meetings about their desire to hold public meetings on this document, there are no public meetings scheduled and no opportunities for public discussion.

The decision by the Advisory Group not to present and discuss the recommendations with the communities that the park serves is troubling given that public concerns were sparked by the 2008 plan that the City and the Parks & Recreation Commission did without public input. Discussion and dialogue about the plan's recommendations would benefit all.

3. *Add Context:* The report needs succinct background information to give the reader context for the narrative to

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follow. For example, there is little information on the creation of Fort Ward Park in terms of the intent of City Council and the various perspectives that Alexandria's community leader's, elected officials and courts have noted while discussing the need for

and purpose of the park.

Another example of the lack of context is the City's intent in developing the park for the stated purposes. The document would lead the reader to believe that a master plan has not been prepared for Fort Ward Park. However, the City Council approved and funded a General Plan for the park in 1962. The Department of Transportation & Environmental Services prepared a Master Plan for the park in 1979. The City Council applied for a received state and federal historic register status in 1982. Each of these documents may not fit the current definition of what a park master plan is but they do show the earliest approved visions for Fort Ward Park.

In addition, the report does not indicate that a great deal of the public's concern about the City's management of the park was sparked by the October 16, 2008 facility study and recommendations for Fort Ward Park. This document was prepared and approved by the City Recreation Department and the Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission without public input or basic information about the natural, historic and cultural resources which the park was created to protect.

More context is also needed about the issues and problems that motivated City Council to convene the Fort Ward Park Advisory Group. The report fails to mention the petition that was submitted to the City Council in October 2007 by residents who live adjacent, and in close proximity, to the park having to do with crime, solid waste dumpsters, maintenance of the park's intermittent stream, and vegetative management of the park's boundaries. Moreover, there is no mention of the concerns regarding graves, solid waste dumpsters, stormwater, and the protection of the park's archaeology and history, which were raised by citizens and members of the Seminary Hill Association, Inc. at a City Council Public Meeting in December of 2008.

The report also fails to provide the reader with background on the City's failure to comply with established city ordinances and regulations related to land use changes, noise, archaeological resources, and soil erosion controls, related to new park development and uses.

Finally, the report makes no mention of the fact that City leaders, despite repeated public statements to the contrary, was aware of African American graves within the park and in certain

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areas chose to ignore their presence.

4. *Clarify Assumptions:* The readers of the report would benefit if there was a succinct section of the introduction that clarified the assumptions that the Advisory Group, and the City for that matter, are operating under in the review of Fort Ward Park. These could

include: the role of the communities in helping create this park; justifications used by the City in legal actions and federal grants to acquire and develop the park; and provisions of the National Register of Historic Places designation. A list of assumptions could also include the key provisions in Resolution No. 2349.

5. *Show Conviction:* The executive summary outlines a list of priority actions for City Council and City department managers to consider. First of all, in many places in the report—including this section, the Advisory Group's recommendations are "soft". The Advisory Group is charged to make recommendations and yet in the Executive Summary they suggest that elected officials "consider" these ideas. The words are seemingly without conviction and should be given backbone if they are to have any chance of being acted on. Anticipatory compromise and, or, business as usual is not an option if the desired result is what Council approved in their charge to the Group.

6. *Set Priorities:* The report would be more effective if it focused more on different levels of priorities. At a minimum what the Advisory Group recommended needs to be put in priority order. As I've listened to most of the Group's public discussions, and the presentations of the department heads, I've learned that the archaeological work will begin the week of November 15, 2010. Recent meetings have revealed the following information.

First, on November 6, 2010 Lance Mallamo, Director of the Office of Historic Alexandria, told the members of the Fort Ward History Work Group that he does not believe that there will be any new funds in this budget year for archaeology at Fort Ward. He said that he talked with people in the City Manager's Office and they want to see the results of the Ground Penetrating Radar work before putting more money toward this task. Mr. Mallamo said that he would try to use some of the National Park Service "Save America's Treasures" grant to do additional archaeology and research on Fort Ward Park.

Second, on November 11, 2010 at the Fort Ward Park Advisory Group Meeting Mr. Mallamo told the members of the group and the public that the initial results of the archaeological research will be available within the next month. This work will

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determine if the use of Ground Penetrating Radar has been successful in identifying graves in the park. He indicated that if the Radar technology is successful he expects that it will be used to look at approximately 80% of the park in 2012.

However, if the Radar technology is not successful in identifying graves he and his staff will look at other alternatives for identifying graves in the park.

Third, on November 10, 2010 Rich Baier, Director of Transportation & Environmental Services (T&ES) wrote in a memo that, "The [City's] Stormwater Project list contains 35k [\$35,000 this year] for stormwater field work and or design [for Fort Ward Park]. The money is still there awaiting the development of a plan which takes into account the Office of Historic Alexandria and RPCA [Recreation Department] needs. Infrastructure and especially drainage improvements must be designed into some overall plan or they risk being removed as the park is improved according to a master plan. As noted in my May presentation to the advisory group, some general field work has been done by in house staff. Nothing major but review of historic aeriels, field review of drainage along houses and condition review of water courses. All is to get ready to kick off work as a part of the park plan effort. In fact I was to come to the advisory group tomorrow night to explain how a grant may be applied for if the park master planning effort includes historic stream restoration efforts. Daniel Imig of my staff will be coming in my stead as I have a mtg conflict. So the bottom line is the funds are there and I am awaiting a plan to work the drainage issues into."

On November 11, 2010 Mr. Imig of T&ES presented some ideas for a possible "Stream Restoration" grant for Fort Ward Park. The presentation included information about sources of funding, project criteria, grant requirements, funding levels, and the deadlines for applying for and using these funds. He indicated that this would only address a portion of the water problems in Fort Ward Park. Advisory Group members concluded that although these funds would be most helpful in solving some of the park's problems this grant alone would have little impact on managing stormwater in the park or the runoff which is damaging the graves and gravestones within the Oakland Baptist Church Cemetery.

It appears that delays in using existing funds to begin the archaeological research have jeopardized receiving any City funds for 2011. Unfortunately delays to the archaeological research could impact the completion of the 2011 Fort Ward Park Stormwater Study funded by the City. Moreover, delays in

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archaeological research and the stormwater study could further delay proper planning, management and protection of Fort Ward Park and the Oakland Baptist Church Cemetery. The forecast seems to indicate that work on any of these problems, if funding is available, would not begin until after 2013.

As Rich Baier wrote in a November 8, 2010 note to me and others, "Nothing will be able to go forward until there is some marriage of the programming--historic---and master planning within the park. The infrastructure needs to be done all as a part of these efforts. I have raised to Roger Blakeley and Jim Spengler that next year's budget will be tight and Ft. Ward has to be master planned prior to getting into

a drainage project”.

Hopefully through the leadership of the Advisory Group, the Departments of Recreation, Historic Alexandria and Transportation & Environmental Services, as well as the members of City Council, can agree soon on the priority actions that are needed to solve the ongoing problems in Fort Ward Park.

I urge you to be pragmatic and look at the tasks in terms of sequential order so that things aren't being funded before they are ready to be implemented. A nature trail, a reinvigorated arboretum, new parking lots, or a memorial to those buried in the park, are all ideas that need to be examined during the preparation of a new master plan. The inventory of archaeology, history, culture and nature has to be completed before site-specific projects can be undertaken. A lack of basic information about Fort Ward Park has resulted in bad park decisions and cost the City and the residents it serves time and money. Good data will result in better city decisions and services.

7. *Come Together*: Throughout the report are descriptions about the interface between City managers, homeowners and residents. Nowhere in your report is this topic examined in any depth and breadth. Fundamental to some of the Fort Ward conflicts is the tension, disrespect and distrust that have been created between City managers, adjacent homeowners, elected officials, and residents. Some of these feelings have been caused by the City acting outside of its own noise, solid waste, soil erosion, archaeology, and Special Use Permit laws. Other conflicts seem to stem from different views about the role of residents in City decisions that affect them. To most residents unilateral, top-down decisions appear to often be the norm in the Recreation Department.

Although the Advisory Group process has been a good way to document differences we still need to make sure that all the

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Fort Ward Park interests have the same goals in mind. It would be most helpful if the report could include some very simple over-arching short-term goals for the park. Perhaps the Group could look at these as “key result areas” for all interests to agree on and get behind. This type of community-based approach to building consensus for City action is an essential change needed at Fort Ward Park.

8. *Postpone New Development*: The lack of basic information for making decisions about the location of graves and other important park, recreation, archaeological, and historic values in the park, would either limit most new development at Fort Ward Park, and, or require that detailed evaluations are done at development sites. The Advisory Group report should either suggest a freeze on new development or a process that is to be followed to avoid inappropriate

decisions.

The development freeze, and or review procedures, would be in place until the City Council approves the new master plan for Fort Ward Park.

9. *Plan for the Plan:* Earlier I sent the Advisory Group some suggestions on park master planning in an attempt to give them a sense of the typical sequence of steps that go into a master plan. Your lists of multiple plans are all elements that go into a standard master plan process. However, there is no recommendation that gets at the need for different City department's to integrate their ideas, information, plans and actions into one consolidated effort.

The report acknowledges that there are a number of plans running on parallel tracks. Unfortunately some of this independent thinking and action has brought all of us together for the last three years. The park seems to be used for at least four different objectives. It was created to protect, interpret and enjoy history and culture. It was created to protect and enjoy open space and passive recreation uses. It has been used as an Arboretum. It is also being used to manage stormwater from the park, Marlboro Estates, and Episcopal/VA Theological Seminary.

In order to meet each of these objectives simultaneously, without impairing the values and functions of the other objectives, future actions need to be integrated. This integration starts with all of the department heads, as well as the City Council and public, agreeing on a Statement for Management for Fort Ward Park. The Statement is a basic document prepared and revised regularly to guide park management and planning. This approach is a straight-forward way of organizing information to make decisions about park use, protection,

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management, interpretation, etc. It shows the relationship between park purpose; management objectives; inventory and analysis; the outline of planning requirements; additional documents needed for a park master plan; and ways to engage the public in the preparation of the master plan.

The Statement for Management could be used to integrate the four major goals of the park as well as identifies what information is needed for future decision-making. It is an essential decision-making path for the City to take in order to achieve the Council's goal of a "Commitment to a balanced, multi-use park and historic site".

10. *Restore Trust and Parkland:* My research of the creation of Fort Ward Park spans a period of more than 60 years. During that time community leaders, city managers, and elected officials have done a great deal of work to protect, restore, interpret, and make publicly accessible the many values of Fort Ward Park. Over time most of the

decisions that were made about the park have been positive and appropriate. Unfortunately some of the decisions that were made about the park have been detrimental to its history and the communities it serves.

Mistakes will happen and the treatment of the graves and the creation of the maintenance yard may have reflected the times or the result of overworked park managers cutting corners to juggle multiple demands. However, City leaders have repeatedly tried to deny or excuse the City's actions with statements that are neither true nor reflective of the responsibility that comes with public service. The Advisory Group should include a recommendation that urges the City managers and local elected officials to apologize to the descendant families of those persons buried in the park, and or, in the Oakland Baptist Church Cemetery for the inappropriate actions taken by the City impacting these areas. The City should also be urged to restore the land, including the topography, drainage, permeability of the soil, and vegetation that has been modified, without proper approvals and public review, within the park maintenance yard. These actions will go a long way in rebuilding trust between City managers and elected officials and the public they serve.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Thanks again!

Sincerely,

Glenn

J. Glenn Eugster